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ABSTRACT

A common assumption in the outdoor field has been that women's development as outdoor leaders has not kept pace with their participation in outdoor adventure activities. A survey about women's employment was mailed to 103 outdoor education programs with an adventure component; 62 responded. The programs served 160,585 participants in 1994, of which 41 percent were female. The programs employed 3,401 staff, of which 45 percent were female. However, women made up only 38 percent of executive staff and 38 percent of governing board members. However, organizations that specifically recruited women did not have higher percentages of women employees. Organizations with an affirmative action hiring policy tended to have higher percentages of women employees overall, but not in the executive category. Among administrators responding to the survey, women had significantly lower salaries than men, and this salary gap was not related to educational level or experience. Female administrators were much more likely than males to have felt discriminated against in the field of outdoor leadership based on their gender. Contains 23 references. (SV)

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# THE CURRENT STATUS OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP

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The study analyzed women's employment rates from 62 outdoor organizations to determine women's representation in the outdoor field. Statistical analysis revealed that women were under-represented in outdoor organizations at the executive and management levels using a proportionality standard. Additionally, women reported lower salaries and higher gender-based discrimination occurrences than their male counterparts.

KEYWORDS: *Outdoor, employment, discrimination, women*

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Women are participating in outdoor adventure activities in ever-growing numbers (Miranda & Yerkes, 1982; Stringer, 1993). Simultaneous with this surge in participation in outdoor recreation has been a significant increase in the number of organizations offering outdoor adventure programs. Such organizations employ outdoor leaders to guide these outdoor experiences. A common assumption in the outdoor field has been that women's development as outdoor leaders has not kept pace with their participation in outdoor adventure activities (Absolon, 1993; Hampton, 1994), and that women are not very visible in leadership positions in outdoor adventure. This is illustrated in a statement by a female mountaineering student at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS):

> As I've gotten involved in more technical and extensive outdoor adventures, I've seen the number of women leaders decrease greatly. I think if I would have had a female instructor on my NOLS course, I would have felt as if I had someone I could relate to more in terms of a role model. (Hampton, 1994, p. 1)

Though some writing and research has been done on women's participation in outdoor adventure activities (e.g., Bean, 1988; Galland, 1980; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1986; Jordan, 1992; Mitten, 1985; Warren, 1985), few studies have focused on women in outdoor leadership positions (Miranda & Yerkes, 1987; Page, 1986). Relatively little is known about the number of women currently employed in outdoor leadership positions. One of the few statistics currently available in print is that 30% of the National Outdoor Leadership School's instructional staff is women (Hampton, 1994).

Several authors have recognized the need for research about women and outdoor leadership (e.g., Miranda & Yerkes, 1982; Knapp, 1985; Warren, 1985). Knapp (1985) identified many potential "gender traps" in outdoor experiential education that needed to be examined (p. 16). These gender traps included discrimination in hiring, pay equity issues, outdoor skill and leadership competency, traditional gender roles, and communication dynamics. He concluded that gender dynamics in outdoor programs have not been investigated thoroughly.

Miranda and Yerkes (1987) conducted one of the only studies done exclusively on women in outdoor leadership. In their study, entitled *Women Outdoor Leaders Today*, they surveyed 200 women outdoor leaders in the United States and received 130 responses. In the study's introduction, the researchers outlined their major assumption:

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> Gender is a fundamental dynamic factor in the career development and professional advancement of women. This is itself a controversial question among outdoor leaders and is not fully tested in this survey. However, there are some indications that women share a belief that gender is either problematic or positively significant in their professional lives (p. 17).

Their study examined four major areas: educational background, motivations, perception of women leaders, and professional opportunities. Miranda and Yerkes found that over 90% of the survey respondents indicated that "gender has had a marked influence on their careers" (p. 19). The authors concluded that their study was just a beginning and further research was necessary to develop a greater knowledge base about gender related concerns in outdoor leadership. This call for further study was one of the major rationales for the present study.

The present study investigated gender related employment concerns in outdoor leadership. The research addressed gaps in understanding by examining how many women were employed by outdoor leadership organizations, the ratio of women to men employed and the types of positions in which women were employed. Along with this description of the current status of women's employment in outdoor organizations, the study used a statistical analysis of gender ratios, salary and reported incidence of discrimination to further explore potential gender traps (Knapp, 1985). Finally, the research concluded by discussing some of the implications of the results for outdoor organizations.

## METHOD

The study utilized a mailed survey to facilitate the collection of data from a large sample of outdoor programs and program administrators. The survey was developed in order to solicit information on two levels: organizational demographics and individual perceptions of outdoor program administrators. On the organizational level, the outdoor program administrators were asked to provide information about their organization such as number and gender composition of staff, gender composition of program participants, type of program, and employment policies. On the personal level, the program administrators were asked to answer questions as individuals. The second part of the survey was developed by adapting an instrument designed by a researcher at the University of British Columbia (Frisbee & Brown, 1991). Information was collected from respondents regarding their individual demographics, career path, and career satisfaction.

Once the survey was developed, it was reviewed for content validity and structure by an expert panel and then the survey was pilot tested. The outdoor programs for the sample were chosen from the *1994-95 Membership Directory and Handbook of the Association of Experiential Education*, a professional umbrella organization for experiential educators which listed 360 member organizations. Since the Association of Experiential Education represents a wide variety of experiential education organizations, including schools, hospitals, and outdoor education organizations, a criterion-based sampling technique was used. Programs that had the words "adventure," "out," or "wilderness," in their names were chosen for inclusion in the study because they would most likely meet the criterion of an outdoor education program with an adventure component. This sampling technique yielded the 103 programs that were surveyed in the present study.

The researcher utilized Dillman's "total design method to survey research" because it is recognized as one of the most effective approaches to maximize response rate (Babbie, 1989). The study produced a response rate of 60% ($n$=62 of $N$=103). The survey research literature suggests that a response rate of 50% is generally considered to be "adequate" and a response rate of 60% is generally considered "good" (Bainbridge, 1989).

The statistical analyses of survey data were done using the Excel spreadsheet software program and the SPSS version 6.1 statistical software program for the Macintosh personal com-

puter. In order to gain an overview of the sample, descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, ranges, means, standard deviations) were calculated for the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. In addition, descriptive statistics were calculated on the responses to each survey question to investigate the shape of their distributions. Since the present study was exploratory in nature, statistical tests were required to attain an alpha of .05 for the results to be considered significant (Babbie, 1989).

Statistical analyses were selected to match the types of data collected and the purpose of each survey question. The survey questions that produced nominal or ordinal data were analyzed using nonparametric statistical procedures and tests such as frequencies, cross-tabulations, and chi-square. The survey questions that produced interval data (Likert-type responses) were analyzed using parametric statistical tests such as correlation and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The choice of parametric tests may be questioned for a non-random sample. After extensive study, however, Kerlinger (1973) contended that unless the sample is "seriously non-normal and variances are heterogeneous, it is usually unwise to use a non-parametric test in place of a parametric one" (p. 287). Additionally, according to Kirk (1982), most parametric tests are robust enough for use with non-probability samples.

## RESULTS

The outdoor programs in the sample serviced 160,585 participants in 1994. Of these participants, 41% ($n$=65,840) were female and 59% ($n$=94,745) were male. The outdoor programs in the sample employed 3,401 staff in 1994. The overall staff gender ratio was 45% women ($n$=1,539) to 55% men ($n$=1,862). Using the one-dimensional chi-square goodness of fit test (Howell, 1992), it was determined that this ratio was significantly different from a theoretical 50-50 gender ratio[1] in the breakdown of the staff ($\chi^2$ [1, $n$=3401] = 30.68, $p < .01$).

Of the 3401 staff members, 51% ($n$=1734) were employed year-round and 49% ($n$=1667) were additional staff hired to cover the peak season. Table 1 provides a visual overview of participant gender ratios and staff gender ratios for various employment categories. Most of the year-round employment categories showed female numbers equal to or greater than the participant female numbers. The executive staff category, however, had a ratio of 38% women to 62% men. Again, using the one-dimensional chi-square goodness of fit test (Howell, 1992), all of the employment categories except support staff and seasonal management showed significant differences from a 50-50 gender ratio at $p < .05$. The outdoor programs also reported the gender breakdown of their governing boards. There were a total of 493 governing board members and 38% ($n$=186) of the members were women and 62% were men ($n$=307) which represented a significant difference in the gender breakdown of governing board members from a 50-50 split ($\chi^2$[1, $n$=493] = 29.7, $p < .01$).

It is interesting to note that of the 62 program administrators who returned surveys, approximately 55% ($n$=34) were women, while approximately 45% ($n$=28) were men. This gender ratio is significantly different ($\chi^2$ [1, $n$=62] = 6.93, $p < .01$) from the year-round management staff gender ratio. The survey instructions asked the person receiving the survey to give it to the person at the organization who was most responsible for the hiring and supervision of field staff such as a program director or staffing coordinator. The significant finding could indicate that women who are being employed at the administrative level are more responsible for

[1] The theoretical 50-50 gender distribution was used in the chi-square test for the expected frequencies because it closely resembles the gender distribution in the overall population of the United States. Women tend to slightly outnumber men but the 50-50 distribution was used for ease in calculation and understanding.

*TABLE 1*

*Gender Ratios for Participants, Governing Board Members, and Various Staff Categories*

| Category | *n* | % of Women | % of Men | Significant Difference at $p < .05$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Participants** | 160,585 | 41 | 59 | yes |
| **Overall staff** | 3401 | 45 | 55 | yes |
| **Year-round overall staff** | 1734 | 46 | 54 | yes |
| **Seasonal overall staff** | 1667 | 45 | 55 | yes |
| **Year-round field staff** | 1071 | 41 | 59 | yes |
| **Seasonal field staff** | 1451 | 45 | 55 | yes |
| **Year-round support staff** | 147 | 44 | 56 | no |
| **Seasonal support staff** | 120 | 48 | 52 | no |
| **Year-round office staff** | 219 | 76 | 24 | yes |
| **Seasonal office staff** | 49 | 74 | 26 | yes |
| **Year-round management** | 216 | 42 | 58 | yes |
| **Seasonal management** | 47 | 40 | 60 | no |
| **Year-round executive staff** | 81 | 32 | 68 | yes |
| **Governing board** | 493 | 38 | 68 | yes |

human resources or that the initial contacts tended to pass the survey on to women because they would be more interested in filling it out.

The organizations in the sample were asked if they specifically recruit female staff. Fifty-six percent ($n$=30) of the organizations answering the question said they recruited women staff members, while 44% ($n$=24) said they did not specifically recruit female staff. As a follow-up question, the organizations were then asked how they recruited women. The two most frequently mentioned methods were through word of mouth ($n$=15) and through advertisements in outdoor jobs newsletters ($n$=18) such as the *Association of Experiential Education Jobs Clearinghouse*. One program stated that it always included the phrase "women and minorities are encouraged to apply" in all its advertising of positions. Ten of the programs recruited through college placement offices and employment fairs. Some ($n$=4) of the organizations recruited women by sending program directors to conferences to network with other organizations, hold informational meetings, and interview potential female staff. One organization set aside special scholarship money for talented female students on its instructor course and provided special technical skills development opportunities for female staff in a single gender setting. Two of the organizations tracked talented women students in their programs and then specifically invited them to apply for staff positions. Another organization had an instructor development program for female staff.

Gender ratios were calculated for programs that specifically recruit women and those that don't. In the categories of overall year-round staff, year-round executive, and seasonal field staff, organizations that specifically recruit

women had a lower percentage of women compared to organizations that don't specifically recruit them. Organizations that specifically recruit women had a higher percentage of women in the year-round and seasonal management categories.

Although none of the differences mentioned above were statistically significant, they raise some interesting questions. Some might expect organizations that specifically recruit women would have higher percentages of women, but this did not hold true for all categories in this sample. It may be that organizations that specifically recruit women have this policy because they have experienced difficulty in hiring women staff, hence the lower percentages. It could also indicate that the recruitment practices being used are ineffective. Since the survey did not gather staffing information over a number of years, these questions cannot be answered within the present study.

The organizations were also asked if, according to federal guidelines, they were equal opportunity employers and affirmative action employers. Eighty percent ($n$=43) checked that they were equal opportunity employers, and 39% ($n$=21) indicated that they were affirmative action employers. It is interesting to note that almost half (48%) of the program administrators surveyed did not know if their organizations were affirmative action employers, since these program administrators are responsible for hiring within their organizations.

Organizations listing themselves as equal opportunity employers showed either slightly lower or equal percentages of women employees compared to the organizations that did not. On the whole, organizations listing themselves as affirmative action employers tended to have higher percentages of women employees compared to the organizations that did not have an affirmative action hiring policy. The category of executive staff was the only exception to this trend.

The staff gender ratios for non-profit and profit organizations were also calculated and compared. Overall, there was very little difference in the staff gender ratios between the two types of organizations, although there was a significant difference in the gender ratios of staff at the year-round management level ($\chi^2[1, n=54] = 4.0, p < .05$). When the number of year-round management level staff was summed for profit-based organizations, the ratio was 32% women to 68% men. When the number of similar staff was totaled for non-profit organizations, the ratio was 43% women to 57% men.

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to identify their salary range. Table 2 summarizes their responses. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) suggested that there was significant difference in the salaries of year-round female and male program administrators ($F$ [1, 53] = 6.29, $p < .01$). Following up on the ANOVA, several measures of central tendency were examined. The mean salary range for year-round female program administrators was $25,000-$29,999, with the mean salary approximately $25,833. The mean salary range for year-round male program directors was $30,000-$34,999, with the mean salary approximately $32,599. The modal salary range for year-round females was $25,000-$29,000, while the modal salary range for year-round male program administrators was over $45,000. Respondents were also asked to rate the extent to which their expectations about salary had been met in their outdoor leadership careers. The results were analyzed using one way ANOVA. There was a significant difference between the responses of the female and male administrators in the area of salary expectations ($F$ [1, 58] = 7.38, $p < .009$); female administrators were less satisfied (mean = 1.64, range = 1-3) with their salaries than male administrators (mean = 2.11, range = 1-3).

To further examine the issue of salary differences, some possible explanations were explored statistically. Although there was a significant difference for salaries between education levels, ($F$ [4, 56] = 2.92, $p < .03$), there were no significant differences in the education levels reported by female and male program administrators. Additionally, there was no significant interaction between gender and

*Table 2*

*A Summary of the Program Administrators' Reported Salaries*

| SALARY | FEMALE | | MALE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| • Under $14,999 | 6 | 18.2 | 2 | 7.1 |
| • $15,000-$19,999 | 2 | 6.1 | 3 | 10.7 |
| • $20,000-$24,999 | 5 | 15.2 | 2 | 7.1 |
| • $25,000-$29,999 | 10 | 30.3 | 4 | 14.3 |
| • $30,000-$34,999 | 4 | 12.1 | 5 | 17.9 |
| • $35,000-$39,999 | 1 | 3.0 | 3 | 10.7 |
| • $40,000-$44,999 | 3 | 9.1 | 2 | 7.1 |
| • Over $45,000 | 2 | 6.1 | 7 | 25.0 |

education variables when a two-way ANOVA was performed on the salary data. Thus, differences in education cannot be used to explain the differences in salary.

Another possible explanation for the differences in program administrators' salaries is the number of years of experience. Program administrators were asked to provide information about their outdoor leadership work history and length of employment in several employment categories. Means were calculated for years of experience in the various employment categories. Follow-up analysis revealed no significant differences in the years of experience between female and male program administrators in any employment category. Additionally, no significant difference was found when total years of experience was compared. Therefore, differences in years of experience cannot be used to explain the differences in these program administrators' salaries.

Finally, the program administrators were asked how often they had felt discriminated against in the field of outdoor leadership based on their gender. Twenty-nine percent ($n$=10) of the female administrators reported never feeling such discrimination, while 68% ($n$=19) of the men reported likewise. Feeling discriminated against once or twice were 32% of the women ($n$=11) and 21% of the men ($n$=6). Twelve percent ($n$=4) of the female administrators reported feeling discriminated against three or four times, and 11% of the male administrators reported similarly. No male administrator reported feeling discriminated against five or more times on the basis of his gender but a large portion of the female administrators (27%, $n$=9) reported feeling discriminated more than five times based on their gender.

Analysis (one-way ANOVA) found that there was a significant difference in the levels of gender-based discrimination reported by female and male administrators ($F$ [1, 60] = 13.43, $p < .001$). Of the administrators reporting at least one incident of discrimination, 73% were female while 27% were male. The female administrators reported a greater incidence of gender-based discrimination (mean = 2.35, range = 1-4) as compared to the male administrators (mean = 1.42, range = 1-4). When the results were adjusted for differences in sample size (to allow comparison between groups), the female administrators reported at least 56 cases of discrimination based on gender while the male administrators reported at least 12 such cases.

## DISCUSSION

Some of the results pertaining to the current status of women's employment in outdoor lead-

ership were surprising and challenged current assumptions in the outdoor adventure field, while other results confirmed them. Many outdoor programs aim to have the number of female staff they employ, match or exceed the number of female participants they serve (Hampton, 1994). If the number of women employed does not match the participant numbers, women employees are defined as underrepresented. This defining process is similar to the "proportionality measure" that is one method used to assess compliance with Title IX in college sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988). A college is said to be in compliance with Title IX if the resources given to female athletes matches the proportion of female students in the undergraduate population.

Prior to the present study, a wide-spread belief was that women were underrepresented in outdoor leadership organizations (Absolon, 1993, Hampton, 1994). It was assumed that women were underrepresented at all levels of employment, such as field instructors, program administrators and executive staff. Using the outdoor program version of the proportionality measure as a standard, women, as expected, were underrepresented at the executive and governing board levels. Women's employment at the field instructor, support staff, and office staff levels exceeded the female participant proportion. This result was surprising since the assumption was that women were underrepresented at all levels. Though it is common practice for outdoor organizations to use their participant gender ratio as a benchmark for evaluating their staff gender ratios (Hampton, 1994), many of the survey respondents thought that outdoor programs should aim to have gender ratios in their students and staff match that of the general population. One study participant expressed this thought: "My theory is that we are conditioned to expect there will be less [sic] women in outdoor organizations. We are surprised and happy when we've reached 30-40% representation. Why shouldn't we expect 50%?" If a 50% male 50% female gender proportion is used as a standard, women in this study were underrepresented in every staff category except office staff. Please note that these findings relate to the organizations in the study sample only, with no attempt to generalize to the field.

In her study of the corporate environment, Kanter (1977) noted that women are underrepresented in male-dominated organizations because of the interaction of three variables: opportunity, power and proportion. Opportunity refers to an individual's perceptions of her or his prospects to move up the career ladder. Power refers to the amount of influence that an individual wields within an organization and to the existence of mentors and supportive peers. Proportion refers to the ratio or numbers of a particular group within an organization. In this study, proportion refers to the ratio of female staff to male staff in outdoor leadership organizations.

Kanter (1977) found that within corporate environs, the people which have the greatest similarity in terms of socio-demographic characteristics to the administration are the ones most likely to be hired and promoted. She defined this process of hiring employees who are similar to the dominant group as "homologous reproduction" (p. 48). Since historically women in outdoor organizations have had less opportunity, less power, and fewer numbers than their male peers, their continued under-representation may be attributable to homologous reproduction.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTDOOR ORGANIZATIONS

The above findings have several implications for practice. First, during the study it became evident that two standards for determining under-representation exist within the field of outdoor leadership: the proportionality standard and the overall population standard. As seen above, the choice of standard influences the outcome of the analysis. Further study is necessary, at both the organizational and field levels, to determine the most appropriate standard for use by outdoor organizations and for doing future analysis. Second, additional research is needed to "break open" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 75) the gender ratios found in this study to better

understand the additional factors that influence women's employment (Loeffler, 1995).

Salary is another indicator of occupational status. Many female respondents expressed concern about the amount of remuneration they receive. Several said that early in their careers they did not care about salary issues, but later realized they needed to start planning for retirement. Many women mentioned they were contemplating leaving the field of outdoor leadership because of their low salaries. One woman summed up her decision by saying:

> I'm leaving outdoor leadership because I don't want to retire in poverty. I didn't much think about the money early in my career because I was having so much fun. It wasn't until I was older that I began to see the implications of subsistence living.

The study results support Knapp's (1985) identification of pay equity as a potential "gender trap" for outdoor organizations. One female respondent commented that although her organization had several "pro-women policies," she suspected that women in her organization were paid less than the men. Three other women also mentioned concern over pay inequities and overall, women were less satisfied with their salaries than their male counterparts. In the present study, male administrators reported salaries that were significantly higher than female administrators and this difference could not be explained through differences in education or years of experience. Issues of salary and pay inequity are key for women employed in the outdoor field. Outdoor organizations need to examine their remuneration policies for gender bias and further research is necessary to examine the effects of low salaries on staff retention.

In this study, women reported the incidence of gender-based discrimination at a significantly greater rate than men. Further study is necessary to investigate and disclose the nature of such discrimination and it's influence on women's employment in outdoor leadership. Once the discrimination is better understood, outdoor programs will be able to make programmatic or procedural changes to maximize women's career opportunities.

The present study investigated the current status of women's employment in outdoor leadership. The study analyzed women's employment rates from 62 outdoor organizations to provide a clearer overall picture of women's representation in the field. Statistical analysis determined that women were under-represented in outdoor organizations at the executive and management levels using the proportionality standard and under-represented at all levels except office staff using the population standard. Further analysis determined that women reported lower salaries and higher gender-based discrimination occurrences than their male counterparts. Further study is recommended to further understand all of these and other variables influencing women's employment in outdoor leadership.

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